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Message Text

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14
ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 EB-11 XMB-07 OPIC-12 L-03

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 DOTE-00 AID-20 TRSE-00

OMB-01 DRC-01 /110 W
---------- 025368
R 050800Z JAN 74
FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5123
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USDOC WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB
SUBJ: TRANSGABON RAILROAD - SELECTION OF ENGINEER

USDOC FOR STEPHEN CONGER

REF: (A) STATE 000266 (NOTAL); (B) LIBREVILLE 0012

1. HAD OCCASION OVER HOLIDAY WEEKEND AND RAILROAD INAUGURATION CEREMONIES TO DISCUSS NEED FOR CONSULTING ENGINEER (OR CONSORTIUM) FOR RAILROAD WITH MINISTERS BOUMAH (PLAN), MALEKOU (PUBLIC WORKS) AND RAWIRI (FOREIGN AFFAIRS). ALSO WITH OBIANG EKOMIE (NOMINAL HEAD OF OCTRA). ALL AGREED WITH NEED FOR SUCH STEP BUT DID NOT SEEM CONSCIOUS OF URGENCY. I POINTED OUT THAT IF GOG TO TAKE SUCH STEP, THE SOONER THE BETTER AS FIRM (OR CONSORTIUM) COULD HELP IN COMPLEX PROBLEM OF REVIEWING BIDS, ETC. EVERYONE SEEMED TO AGREE, BUT ALL DEPARTED WITH PRESIDENT BONGO EVENING JANUARY 1 FOR TWO-WEEK TRIP TO ARAB COUNTRIES (EXCEPT FOR OBIANG EKOMIE WHO IS UNFORTUNATELY LITTLE MORE THAN FIGUREHEAD).
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2. IN FURTHER PRODDING OF FRENCH AMBASSADOR RIBO, HE TOLD ME THERE WAS SPLIT WITHIN FRENCH GOVERNMENT ON ISSUE AND FRENCH POSITION NOT YET FIRM. SPLIT DUE TO RIVALRY BETWEEN VARIOUS FRENCH FIRMS WITH SOME POWERFUL FRENCH INTEREST OBJECTING TO SOFRERAIL GETTING BUSINESS. RIBO IMPLIED THAT THESE OTHER GROUPS MIGHT TRY TO TORPEDO CONCEPT OF HIRING CONSULTING ENGINEER CONSORTIUM. RIBO HIMSELF PROFESSED TO RECOGNIZE NEED FOR SUCH SERVICES.

3. IN FURTHER CONVERSATION WITH LOCAL FED REP BRIZIO, I SOUGHT TO DISSUADE HIM FROM HIS IDEA OF HAVING FED ITSELF PERFORM SUPERVISORY CONTROL JOB (HIRING CONSULTANTS DIRECTLY). I ALSO RAISED MATTER WITH ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TO SOUND OUT HIS VIEWS (GERMANS ALREADY STRONGLY FAVOR CONSULTING ENGINEERS). RESULT OF MY TALKS WITH BRIZIO (WHO IS ITALIAN) AND ITALIAN AMBASSADOR IS THAT THEY SUGGESTED CONSORTIUM OF ONE AMERICAN (TAMS), ONE FRENCH AND ONE ITALIAN FIRM. THEY MAY RAISE THIS IN FED.

4. I HAD OCCASION TO MENTION MATTER AGAIN BRIEFLY TO BONGO PRIOR HIS DEPARTURE JANUARY 1 STRESSING ADVANTAGES TO GABON OF MOVING RAPIDLY ON THIS QUESTION. HE NODDED HIS ASSENT, BUT IS UNLIKELY TO TAKE ANY ACTION BEFORE HIS RETURN.

5. BELIEVE TAMS REP SHOULD COME TO LIBREVILLE WITH FULL DOCUMENTATION. THERE IS NO POINT IN MAKING VISIT BEFORE BOGO RETURNS, HOWEVER, AND HIS ETA TENTATIVELY ANNOUNCED FOR JANUARY 15. SUGGEST TAMS REP PLAN ARRIVAL JANUARY 15 (THERE DIRECT NEW YORK-LIBREVILLE PANAM PLANE ARRIVING THAT DAY) AND I WILL SEEK TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENT AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE THEREAFTER.

6. PROBLEM IS THAT WHILE THERE IS GENERAL CONSENSUS ON NEED FOR CONSULTING ENGINEERS, FED AND FRENCH POSITIONS STILL SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS AND NO ONE ON GOG SIDE SEEMS CAPABLE OR ANXIOUS TO TAKE POSITIVE INITIATIVE. BONGO COULD, HOWEVER, TAKE DECISION ON HIS OWN IF WE CAN COAX HIM TO. DANGER OF LETTING ISSUE DRAG ON IS THAT WE MAY END UP WITH EITHER OCTRA ATTEMPTING JOB ALONE OR WORSE YET
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SOME FED-FRENCH SOLUTION WHICH OMITS ANY AMERICAN FIRM. ANOTHER DIFFICULTY IS THAT THERE ARE SO MANY GABONESE MINISTERS INVOLVED WITH NONE HAVING CLEAR-OUT OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY.

7. TSIBA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OCTRA, MAKING TRIP TO CANADA AND U.S. RECOMMEND DEPT'S MESSAGE TO OTTAWA (AS SUGGESTED REF B) INCLUDE INVITATION TO MEET WITH

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AF/C.

8. THINGS ARE MOVING IN RIGHT DIRECTION, HOWEVER, IF WE CAN JUST KEEP THEM ON TRACKS. GENTLE PRODDING IN BRUSSELS AND PARIS MIGHT HELP.
MCKESSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CONSTRUCTION, RAILROADS, CONTRACTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 JAN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974LIBREV00019
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: LIBREVILLE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740160/aaaaceyj.tel
Line Count: 121
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: (A) STATE 000266 (NOTAL); (B) LIBREV, ILLE 0012
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <02 APR 2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <24 APR 2002 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

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30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TRANSGABON RAILROAD - SELECTION OF ENGINEER USDOC FOR STEPHEN CONGER
TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB, TAMS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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